

# Detecting Coronary Artery Disease in Women

When symptoms are silent and subtle

**W**ould you believe that heart disease affects more women than men? It's true. Heart disease is the leading killer of women, claiming over 250,000 women's lives a year. Cardiovascular disease, which includes stroke and hypertension, as well as heart disease, kills more American women than men each year.

"When it comes to coronary artery disease, women's symptoms are atypical. It's common for women to miss the symptoms or attribute them to another condition," said Pierre Chahraban, MD, a board certified cardiologist who has special interest in cardiovascular disease prevention.

Dr. Chahraban stresses that it is extremely important to be attentive to symptoms that are out of the ordinary for your personal health, err on the side of caution and bring these symptoms to the attention of your primary care physician.

"Prevention is crucial. Risk factor modifications early in life will have a long-term impact on your health," said Dr. Chahraban. "Don't wait for your first heart attack, act now. Involve your physician and raise concerns. You have a critical role in communicating with your doctors."

## Take Preventative Measures for Your Heart Health

Whether you are healthy or at risk for coronary artery disease it's important to be mindful of the steps you can take for your health today, and into the future:

- Lower your cholesterol
- Check your blood pressure periodically
- Develop better dietary habits
- Don't smoke
- Exercise regularly
- Seek treatment as appropriate
- Maintain communication with your doctor

"It's so important for women to understand this disease and the risk factors, to embrace their ability to change its course. Partnering with your primary care physician and openly communicating any concerns is critical," added Sunit Mukherjee, MD, who specializes in cardiovascular medicine and is board certified in interventional cardiology. "Your primary care physician can advise you of whether any of your levels are high and work with you to define an action plan that is based on your personal health conditions."

## Be Aware of the Silent Killer

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is known as the silent killer. This condition greatly increases your risk for developing cardiovascular diseases, it can also cause a stroke. There are no symptoms. "Checking your blood pressure periodically is important. While your PCP and specialists will check it, you can check it more frequently at local pharmacies and even health fairs," said Dr. Chahraban. If you are at greater risk, your doctor may recommend that you have a blood pressure cuff at home so you can regularly monitor your levels.

## Take Action

Talk to your primary care provider about your risk for a heart attack and always alert them of any suspicious symptoms. It's better to be overly cautious than ignore possible signs. Your PCP will refer you to a cardiologist if your health condition necessitates this and/or if symptoms require specialized medical attention.

## Symptoms of Coronary Artery Disease for Women:

- Extreme fatigue that is out of the ordinary
- Chest discomfort, which can sometimes feel like heartburn
- Jaw pain
- Arm pain / tingling
- Upper neck / shoulder pain

## Know your risk factors and make smart health choices that may prevent a heart attack.

- Family history of premature heart disease
- Being 55 years and older
- Diabetes – Type I or II
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- High cholesterol
- Smoking (or exposure to second-hand smoke)
- Overweight/obesity
- Physical inactivity
- Stress
- Drinking too much alcohol



Pierre Chahraban, MD, a board certified cardiologist, monitors a patient having a stress test.

## Cardiac Care at Holy Family Hospital

*Holy Family Hospital provides advanced diagnostic tests and treatment options for patients with a wide range of cardiac conditions, including coronary artery disease, congestive heart failure and arrhythmia. We have a state-of-the-art catheterization lab, provide 24/7 angioplasty for heart attack victims as well as elective coronary angioplasty. Our cardiac rehabilitation program is AACVPR accredited. For information on cardiac care at Holy Family Hospital, visit [www.steward.org/cardiac-and-vascular](http://www.steward.org/cardiac-and-vascular).*